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AUTHOR Meier, Deborah W.
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ABSTRACT

This conference paper examines some of the issues pertaining to students' disillusionment with education. It is argued that until students see themselves as parties to their own education, they will not become engaged in learning. In particular, students do not care about education because they fail to see the connection between the skills necessary for certification and the rewards that follow. In addition, some subcultural norms conflict with the definition of intellect as "academic." It is argued that threats, enforced by national standards and monitored through a system of examinations, will not motivate students to learn. Suggestions are made to apprentice young people to experts who demonstrate how to carry out intellectual activity; offer students an educational experience they consider worthwhile; honor teachers; and invest resources in education. Schools must have purposes that connect school competency and life competency, promote relationships, and provide resources for education. (LMI)

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April 1993 - "Notes" for Speech in Atlanta to AERA: Entitled

Why Kids Don't "Want" to be Well-Educated?

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Deborah W. Meier

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Why Kids Don't "Want" to be Well-Educated?

There's one party that's been unheard from in the debate over educational goals. Our students. They've become the objects of our concern, but not the subject.

I've tried to have such conversations occasionally, and they have ideas. But ... they come to it from a very different framework. Their words rarely fit into the dialogue as we've framed it. For one thing, they haven't been brainwashed by the notion of some cataclysmic decline in standards, the end of Western civilization, the nation's economy collapsing under the weight of their ignorance, and our shameful standing in the international tables of academic success. Their complaints thus about their lives - and these are the complaints of all times and all places. And I think them essentially correct.

(They notice that their parents are actually not better educated than they, for example. They notice that the news media doesn't live up to what we claim are criteria for well-documented evidence and that the important and famous people they most admire aren't particularly well-educated.)

I too, like my students, find the familiar litany suspect. More than suspect. I've been suspicious for years, and am grateful to David Berliner and Gerald Bracey for finally putting into print the astonishing truth - the emperor wears no clothes and never did.. I remember - skeptic that I am - and influenced by my own family history of radical anti-communism, being suspicious about the postSputnik claims regarding America's dire straits in comparison to Russian

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educational miracles. It struck me as unlikely on the face of it that a totalitarian system which had been buffeted by war and devastation, had diverted large sums of its limited resources to military needs and which permitted so little intellectual freedom could really outdo a strong powerful democratic society.

Nor was I more impressed when ten years later the radical left took up the same claims, and was ready to burn the whole system down and start afresh. Schools were worse than nothing many a friend of mine claimed, and were surprised to find me unconvinced. Ending the involuntary servitude of mandatory public education was the argument put forth by some critics of capitalism, not its saviors. . I found much of the critique persuasive, but none of the solutions. I thought our schools were doing what they had been set up to do. I just wanted us to set new sights; I wanted all the kids to get the education I had gotten - from a combination of family, school and politics.. Given our success at accomplishing the task we had set ourselves, I figured we could do this harder task too - if we had mind to do so.

It's odd that its the enemies of that New Left, in the name of fighting its pernicious impact, that now has taken up a similar cry: don't trust our schools, they are unfit to do the job. Down with the tradition of local public schooling.

Hyperbole make me nervous. It avoids the critical subtleties upon which real reforms must operate: kids as they really are. Adults as they really are too. Hyperbole - of which A Nation At Risk is the king of them all - leads us from alarm into despair and cynicism .... and the wrong solutions. .

With very questionable use of data, the latest common wisdom has declared public education in America such a terrible failure that it needs to be replaced. Reform is no longer enough. Everyone has become a revolutionary - we have seemingly learned nothing from the classic defeat of 20th century revolutionaries. Either abolish public schools in favor of the private market place; or give the Federal government more power, without the interference of a stupid, pernicious and ornery local public or local professionals. We need standards, some say, while others frankly say - we need standardization! The old factory-style school was no good, but standardization is still fashionmable.

For one reason or another neither school teachers nor parents nor local citizens can be trusted to collectively and democratically set goals and standards for their schools nor monitor their own work. Nor can we afford schools that define being well-educated in diverse ways. Some very powerful groups have become suspicious of such flawed democratic processes, and enamored of the alternatives to it: wise centralized expertise backed by scientifically designed assessments or the superior wisdom of the unregulated private market place. One or the other, or some combination of both. The messiness of local democracy is scaring us. (Churchhill's quote: re democracy's only virtue - the alternatives are worse.)

God forbid the people who are closest to the schools - parents, teachers or local citizens, not to mention children - should muck it up.

If these solutions are wrongheaded it's for three related but quite different reasons: it's not good for democracy, it's not good for the kind of educational goals we're all busy proclaiming, and it's not good for equity! Democracy can't flourish when we deprive it of the kind of lay debate that schooling illicits - a topic that bears directly on our shared public futures. Neither the voice of expertise, nor the voice of individual parental self-interest should replace the public's concern over educational purposes. Secondly, it's an oxymoron to imagine we can get thoughtful schools manned by mindless adults following orders - schooling is not a technical enterprise, but a thoughtful one. And finally it defies history to imagine that the marketplace will ever attend to the needs of those least able and most vulnerable.

What such proposed solutions forget is that the kind of schooling we're seeking must engage its subjects. The kids have to want to become well-educated. That's the rub! Those ornery kids who are the subject of it all.

to quote Joseph Priestley - on the occasion of the dedication of New College in London in 1794

"Whatever be the qualifications of your tutors, your improvement must chiefly depend on yourselves. They cannot think or labor for you, they can only put you in the best way of thinking and labouring for yourselves. If, therefore you get knowledge you must acquire it by your own industry. You must form all conclusions and all maxims for yourselves, from premises and data collected and considered by yourself. And it is the great object of this institution to remove every bias the mind may be under, and to give the greatest scope for true freedom of thinking and enquiry."

It's all there" the goal - to learn to be learners; the means: hard work. Not learned but a learner. Every word Priestly speaks is equally true for the teachers of such schools as its students - what is not true of the one can't be true of the other either, at least not for long.

What our student's think about our enterprise, as Priestley would have understood, is at the heart of the matter. If schooling chiefly depends on their industry, then we must engage their industry. (Note also: If schooling depends also of the faculty, then our schools must be centers of lengagement for them too. We can't leap over their heads - by teacher-proofing our schools.)

Until our students see themselves as parties to their own education - as Mike Rose says so eloquently in "Lives On the Boundary" - they will not cross the divide. The need a bridge that connects their understanding of the meaning of the world to the one being offered by Capital E Education. That's assuming Capital E Education is something worth crossing over to get!

I know it's fashionable to claim that there are no real consequences to failure in American schools, that our kids are coddled. That's why, some argue, they don't do well! What terrible nonsense. I think of the terrible & immediate consequences facing every student we've "lost" at our school. (CPE story) Of the thousands who leave NYC schools each year to desperate lives.. The consequences are jail, early death, poverty. And they know it. They know the consequences . Sure, some probably fool themselves that somehow they'll be the exception. Would I have it otherwise? Would it be better were they to truly know the odds against them?

They are simply not aware of any more realistic alternatives. The alternatives we offer are as far fetched and unlikely. The odds of succeeding through schooling and the odds of succeeding via street smarts and a lucky break seem equally problematic - and in fact they probably know more cases of the latter than the former. The miracle to me is how many we talk into it, by suasion, by affection and above all by exposure to a powerful alternate vision. (CPE data) They'd like to believe. that's what we have going for us. But think how few kids are offered such suasion, such affection and such powerful visions of hope.

They can't buy in until they can taste what it is that we're claiming might lie on the other side - they need more than the usual drive. Something powerful enough to tempt them to cross over that invisible but very real boundary that separates our worlds. It's a leap of faith into an unknown, unless the taste is already in their mouths. It helps if Iweshow them they can cross back and forth. But mostly it takes an immersion experience - like the first time you truly experienced staying afloat, or riding the two-wheeler without anyone holding.

It's like learning a foreign language. After the first success, the 3rd and 4th come easier. You have a feel for it. But "it" has to be something you can feel.

Years ago I traveled to Spain with a friend. We went to the Prado - visiting museums was part of the expected rite of such traveling. We got there late and after an hour or so a guard reminded us the museum would soon be closing. I was sorry since my companion's greater interest in art was enlivening the experience for me and I was enjoying it more than usual.

But I was unprepared for her reaction. I could tell that our required departure was creating genuine pain for her. She was experiencing something I didn't "get". The only way to relieve her discomfort was to assure her we'd go there first thing in the morning. "It means that much to you," I asked? She was as surprised by my lack of understanding as I was by hers. We stood, the two of us, on different sides of a divide that I knew no way to cross. But for the first time in my life I recognized, and envied, what art could mean for others.

It was an experience that I relived, from the other side, a few years later when I remarked to a group of adults in a course I was teaching, that I was late because I had hated leaving my car - I was right in the middle of a Mozart Quintet I loved. There was a silence, and finally one student asked: "Do you really listen to Mozart for pleasure?" She understood why classical music might improve ones mood, create serenity. But she couldn't imagine how such dry and remote music could arouse passion in me. That was unfathomable.

So. In part the kids don't "want" to be "well educated" because they can't even imagine what it is that we claim could be "wantable" about it - other than the credential at the end. They don't see a logical connection between the skills needed to get the certificate and the goodies that follow. Jobs, a good life. It's a hoop you must jump through. Hoops are tolerable if you can imagine being "good at it. If you haven't a lot of trouble jumping through those particular hoops, then who cares if they really make a lot of sense. Rites of passage are, after all, not always meant to be logical. It's a problem only if you seem to have no "natural" talent for it! Then it's a terrible dilemma. Then it demands some kind of explanation. It's not easy to give a good one. Try it out for exercise on a naive subject - an alien so to speak.

We aren't convincing because we're not sure what the connection is between school competency and life competency, and we certainly can't find a lot that we do in most schools that bears much resemblance to anything powerful people do later on. And what powerful people do "do", in fact is something kids have far more "natural" talent at - only schools ignore such talents! Odd!

Our definition is just plain off! We've defined being well-educated in a way that makes no sense to our kids, except that it's esoteric! The pseudo-goal - training everyone to be an academic - inevitably leads to watering down, at best, and utterly distorting at worst, the meaning of academia, making it even harder to fathom! **If we spent the time getting the goals right, we might make it possible to live up to them.**

For example: why history. Because? If you don't study history you'll be doomed to repeat it? Do we truly believe that historians are better able to set the course of policy than nonhistorians, or that nations with a higher rate of historical knowledge have done better than those without it? Can we find any empirical evidence that individuals with high quotients of historical knowledge make fewer mistakes? I can think of a lot of evidence to the contrary. How about - it offers a "common language"? I know an alternate common language that would be a lot easier and cheaper to teach - the language of TV - if a common language was all we needed. DItto for literature. the arts, not to mention math and science. (Believe me, we try. CPE.)

Do the environmental decisions being made in nations who do better on science exams surpass ours? Surely if kids look to their heros, the evidence for a connection between school subjects and success is nonexistent.

In fact, the claims for a good academic education are largely based on barest of evidence; surprising given the mammoth nature of the enterprise? The study of algebra, for example, is alternately based on claims that (1) it's good for the mind, (2) we all really need it to survive in modern society or (3) like it or not, it's an essential gatekeeper for higher skilled jobs and thus a defensive necessity to prevent being closed out of such opportunities. Most of us can't remember the last time we solved a problem using an agebraic equation.

Hard data freaks, measurement folks! Arise! Find us some statistics that show some hard connection between academia and success - personal or national. (Unless, could it be, we're arguing for learning for "the love of it"? Then we'd judge it by whether we had made it "loveable"!)

The connection lies in the history of schooling, which I shan't go into here: except to say it's got nothing to do with the goals we now seek to meet. Suffice it to say, tradition has made certain topics prerequisites for others quite aside from their current use. You need calculus to become an architect; or math to go into premed. even though my brother, an architect, tells me he has never used calculus, and my doctor? calculus?

We spend years teaching paper and pencil arithmetic and make it a gatekeeper to more advanced math - rather than teaching our students to depend on calculators because, we're told, suppose you didn't have access to a calculator - as though the long division system we all learned was not itself an artificial crutch - what would we do without a paper and pencil!

The particulars have changed in the past 100 years. What they have in common is their capacity to define who is well-educated so that most people aren't. By their scarcity ye shall know them. In fact so that most people don't want to be! Even the arisocratic student desired only a gentlemanly C.

We need to invent a new tradition, with goals that all honor and all could be.

It's no accident that the phrase "it's academic" - means: it's irrelevant, moot, of no importance to the ordinary concerns of life. Like Latin or the proper dialect - it "marks" you, sets you apart - that IS it's value. Like a precious metal, it loses value if it becomes "common."

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In fact, utilitarian is the antonym of academic. We know a course has low academic standing when it's advertised as being practical.

No one sitting here imagines that the average student might **want** to be an academic - accept it as <u>their</u> goal? In truth, we're not surprised that they resist. We'd even be suspect if they didn't - part of the deal is that you are willing to do something unpleasant and useless to prove yourself worthy.

Granted some small few might have set their hearts on being college professors, or scholarly researchers. It's one among many professions that the young might set their heart on. But not even in our grandest dreams, do teachers nor the public expect that most students have such goals in mind, nor the kind of mindsets that makes such dreams seem tangible or valuable. Not to mention realistic. How many academics do we want? Nor, of course, could many claim that the form in which academia is presented to the young bears much resemblance to the academic tradition itself. (Imagine if basketball were emasculated in a similar fashion - how many youngsters would willingly spend hours practising without coercion?)

Then why do we claim "academia" to be the central goal of schooling and define the real stuff in such terms? I suspect we don't even realize that's what we've done. If a dental school aims at producing dentists - does it follow that an academy rightfully aims at producing academics? When I say it aloud, it's obvious that we don't really mean what we say.

If we want to keep the academic traditions alive and healthy - decidedly a worthy public responsibility, to insure that such disciplines continue to thrive so that they can feed our long term worldly as well as spiritual pursuits - there must be a cheaper and sounder way to do that then make academia the gatekeeper for **all** worthy adult activities!

In short - we cannot get kids to want to be something we don't genuinely want them to be. And we do <u>not</u> want them all to be academic. (And if we did want them all to be academics, we'd sure as heck have to make academia appear more exciting. But that's another story.)

Conversely what we do want them to be, we must make real, tangible, believable, credible. - <u>and valued.</u> We need a clear explanation to give them of why being well-educated matters so much that they must give up the better part of their youth to become it! And we must be sure that it a goal that's reachable for ordinary, healthy boys and girls - that taps their best and finest qualities.

We might even want them to be intellectuals - all of them - god forbid. That's where my vote would go. Beauticians and plumbers as well as lawyers and doctors. Or to paraphrase using Ted Sizer's language: teach them to use their minds well! But is academic a synonym for intellectual? Is it the only form in which we "use our minds well"?

Can one be intellectually competent and nonacademic? I don't need to remind all of you that one can surely be academic and nonintellectual!

We might want them to be curious - to ask how come and why and is it truly so? We might want them to be closely observant, to keep their eyes and ears open for patterns, for details, for the unusual. We might want them to be playful - to imagine, wonder, to put things together in new and interesting ways. We might want them to have skeptical and open minds to new ideas. We might want them to be in the habit of imagining how others think, feel and see the world, to being in the habit of stepping into the shoes of others. How else, after all, can we follow the golden rule. We might want them to be respectful of evidence and open to reasonable discourse. We might want them to be in the habit of imagining that they might be wrong, to seek evidence for the opposing side with as much fervor as they seek evidence for their own - in the spirit of scientific endeavors. We might want them to be able to communicate carefully, persuasively and powerfully in a variety of mediums - through the skilled use of written and spoken language, and increasingly through the careful use of other mediums. We might want them to enjoy the exercise of their mind.

Such goals are lofty, rigorous, and far-reaching. But nothing I've said speaks one way or another about particular disciplines of academia, although all may draw upon them. The particular academic disciplines have value - justify their special status - precisely because they can inform our intellects - not the other way around. I'm not arguing against academia - but just the imperialistic presumption that being well-educated equals being an academic.

The history of this coupling is one thing. It's a history that no longer fits our condition or our aspirations. So let's consider uncoupling it so we can really fight, without tongue in cheek, for high and rigorous standards for all kids. Yes, there's an argument for insisting that all citizens be taught the value of these traditions, but only those intending to make a career of academia need to go to school devoted to academia - and that can wait for college. Academia is, in short, only one of many vocations. The essential question is what are the habits of mind that underlie all worthy and well-done vocations - including the vocation of citizenship - in a democratic society.

If our definition of an educated person were the broader and tougher claim, rather than the narrower more specialized one - were we to see academics as an example of important human intellectual activity not a synonym for such activity - then we'd be asking different questions and finding different answers.

Then we'd realize that the problem is not that our schools are in decline or teachers can't be trusted, but that changing the purpose of schooling is hard work, especially in a society that can't quite figure out what it wants to change it into. We're stuck at the moment right between two worlds - past and future, and the most vulnerable kids are bound to get hurt the worst at such moments. There's good reason to force the pace of change if only for this reason.

It's not a question of vocational vs academic, but engaging in the kind of national debate that helps us invent a new category, a new term for using our minds well for the consideration of what society agrees are worthy goals.

To repeat myself: if we want kids to get into the habit of taking ideas seriously, of tolerating a bit of ambiguity and uncertainty, of viewing the capacity to persuade others as a form of power, of looking upon the gathering of evidence as useful to making important decisions, and always inclined to take the time to understand the other guy's viewpoint and experience before rushing to condemn it, we'd create schools of quite another order. We'd not bother worrying whether it's academic or vocational.

If we're serious about such a goal we need to ask of each and every reform: will it increase the odds that such habits will flourish in our schools?

For starters: We'd apprentice young people to experts who have such habits and who then demonstrate them in front of their students. We'd think of ways to surround these novices with living examples of how such intellectual activity is carried out by more sophisticated practitioners. And the practitioners would not all\ be "academics", although they would all use their minds actively and well.

Indeed, if we looked more closely at "habits" not "outcomes", we'd recognize the importance of the work ethic - one of the main, if not only, value that the old diploma once served - marking as it did the capacity to stick it out. We only fool ourselves when we pretend that employer's - at least for the vast majority of our children - aren't still at least as concerned over work habits as they are over so-called "cognitive" skills, and certainly over academic knowledge. Hopefully, the nature of the work habits they value has also changed. Of far greater importance than formerly is the willingness to take initiative, to use good judgement, to collaborate, along with the old verities - to do one's best, to be someone you can count on, to attend regularly and meet deadlines. Such qualities and dispositions are of far greater importance in the workplaces of America than knowing the date of the American Revolution. (Such habits of work are also more important to me in a friend, a mate, a colleague.)

What do we really want? For example: If we wanted all adults to appreciate the power of art, we'd insist that in their youth they be surrounded by people engaged in art. Then they'd see how painstakingly an artist works. They'd see that it involves effort, not just talent. They wouldn't imagine a painting is dashed off every 45 minute period.

We'd get the ratios right - the numbers of novices vs experts. We'd create schools in which adult values have a fighting chance, not abandon adolescents to a world bereft of powerful adults, cut off from the important work of important people.

We wouldn't blame hormones or rap music for the desperation of our youth. They live in a culture we created for them.

If I want to convince a kid to be a good tennis player, I'd be sure he had seen tennis played, and played well, and under circumstances that might arouse his joy and envy; then I'd make sure he had lots of opportunities to practice it with people who were in his league - while also continuing to be exposed to the real pros. And I'd provide lots of practice, and a little theory too; lots of feedback. Video would be a blessing for this purpose and I'd wonder what I did in the good old days before I had such technology to provide essential feedback.

"Watch how you come around on that ball...see how you've turned.... look at the angle of the racket...." If I knew my student well, I'd notice also if her unconventional backhand might best be left alone. Maybe it works.

But we ask our students to learn a game they've never seen played, and may never see played in their entire lives: in school or out. And we ask them to learn bits and pieces of it without ever having a chance to practice the game it's supposed to be apart of. And the bits and pieces are generally a shoddy replica of the real thing. We, their teachers, are not even sure ourselves whether we remember what the game is and haven't enough time to pause and reflect about it, much less confer with our colleagues.

Not only is the work of our kids without authenticity, but even their teachers, who are the only audience and judge of their work, are unauthentic audiences. Most of the time their teachers are only carriers of so-called academic rules laid down elsewhere - transmitters not owners of the judgements we place on student work. Well-trained scorers.

We fall back - as though it were a virtue to be admired - on our impotence: on the irritable cry "Don't blame me, I don't decide the rules. That's just the way it is."

And to make matters worse, very much worse, it's a game that, unlike basketball or baseball, is much maligned in our general culture. What politician, seeking the votes of generally educated adults - wants to be seen as an intellectual, as passionately concerned about ideas, as very well read, as a lover of the book: much less "academic"? Who would brag about having attended Harvard or gotten straight As? We have words for school smartness - rarely flattering like nerd, egghead and ivory tower.

The preferred kind of smarts is known as ingenuity, the ability to turn a profit, run a business, make a deal, talk good, turn a phrase. We want our politicians smart in a "street" sense - knowing how to play the game of success. We honor wealth more than lore. Being "well-educated" is associated in our history with decadent aristocracy, effeteness, the Eastern establishment, impracticality, and lack of power. Or the wrong kind of power. The truth shall set us free, but.... It's suspect. It's a wee bit unamerican. America's genius has lain thus in its dual and contradictory attitude toward education. The idea has been to do okay, but not to take it too seriously. The question: Can we maintain our healthy skepticism, our respect for labor and common smarts - and honor intellect too? Have we undermined respect for intelligence by equating it with one special form of intelligence - academic in nature. Could we be a nation that sees intellectual achievement as "manly" - as AMerican to the core?

Unlikely , if we define intellect as :"academic" Maybe, if we define it as a well-trained mind in the habit of asking good questions and not easily conned, a weigher of evidence and a maker of good judgements.

The old definition makes it hard for kids, above all for particular subgroups such as working class boys, doubly so for working class black boys, to be asked to excel in an activity otherwise seen as unmanly. The young admire power - and not only the young. And why shouldn't they. If "the word" does not carry power, how dare we demand that young healthy children spend 12 of their best years in devotion to it! How dare we deny them the best life has to offer because they don't cotton to academic issues. Truly cruel and unusual punishment.

Raising the young to honor values otherwise alien to them and their families is much like engaging in an act of conversion. Mass conversions are rare. The closer the traditions, the less the gap the easier. If the convert is not required to give up his or her old ties and beliefs, so much the better. Involuntary conversions don't take. And voluntary ones require willing consent, plus immersion.

Sunday sermons are insufficient. For those who can succeed without effort , who come with the right baggage, the sermon, hypocritical or not is minimally damaging. Their intellects, even their morals, may suffer but not their rank order. (Note also, that it takes far more "academic" prowess to appear educated today - when we have exponentially increased the curriculum compared to my own generation.)

But it's a double whammy for those for whom success requires herculean effort - for whom every step is full of land mines, surprises, embarrassing faux pas. To them the mixed messages we send are killers. They confront a loss of face either way they turn. And in a world which only counts rank order, their chances at best are dim. The risk seems counter-productive.

So what do we propose to do about it? One popular idea is to increase the cost - raise the stakes! Tell the kids who are least capable of catching on to the game, and who are exposed to the least opportunities to see it played, much less opportunities to practice it themselves, that they will be deprived of all opportunities - even those extraneous to the task they've failed at - such as getting a driver's license or playing football, or holding any form of a decent job, **unless and until** they can show off isolated academic skills they'll never again be asked to display in all their lives! Do it, or else.

The assumption that such threats - enforced by national standards, monitored through a system of exams and some kind of internal passport system that requires students to expose their failure forever after - can given the high stakes get kids to invest their best in our schools is demonstrably false. And illogical. As I mentioned before: those already most aware of it have given us their answer - they drop out by the droves.

The trouble is that they are mostly lazy because they don't get it. If they could they would. If their hard work paid off , they'd give it a shot. In fact, each September they return with that hope in mind. It's tough being stuck in a place you always do badly at.

They're in the same fix I was when I quit piano lessons at the age of 13. I practised for 5 long years, but my brother caught up to me after just one year, practising half as much. And his teachers were ever so pleased with him, and ever so irritated with me. I was dutiful. Although they never believed it. But something I was doing didn't turn notes into music - I was, in the jargon of reading theorists a note-reader, I had tunnel vision. Fortunately I could quit, with little loss of esteem. I could become an appreciator of music not a maker of music. But music making, after all, is a frill. It's not a prerequisite without which all roads are blocked. I survived; I quit before I chose laziness.

Our kids are not dying of laziness. They're choosing it - for survival sake.

Our kids will begin to care about being well-educated when we ourselves care about it. They'll overcome their laziness when we figure out what we value enough to make them work at it for 12 long years. We'll need a better national debate - one that includes more than the experts in the academic disciplines - on what we truly honor about the intellect. We'll need to state our claims in credible ways, ways that suggest that ideas are truly powerful, the word matters, and performance counts. Then we'll offer kids schools that - at least part of the time - reach them deeply and offer them something worthy to chew on. That's number one.

When we we care enough, we'll also find ways that honor those exemplars of such skills - the people we hire to teach them to kids. That's number two.

We've apprenticed our kids to masters whose hands we've tied behind their backs so that they cannot exercise their expertise for kids to see. Who ever in school saw a teacher engaged in real intellectual work? What kid ever saw adults in school talking seriously, using the skills we claim to admire? Who ever in school saw teachers, for that matter, as powerful citizens of their schools, making important decisions about what goes on there, rather than mere technicians following the text, handing out the tests, scoring and grading - whose only power in short lay in their power over their very unequal students.

I want schools that are themselves centers of learning, intellectual communities, engaged in the best examples they can of the art they are supposed to engage their students in. The school must become a place where adults are engaged if we are to engage the young. The shoemaker's apprentice needs a real shoemaker. A cooking school surrounds its apprentices with cooks, and gives them real live diners to practice on.

Such schools will be the institutions that educate our less than ideally well-educated teaching force. The schools will embody the virtues they seek to impart. Not always well - because it will take time for us - their teachers - to learn to do this. But if we stick with it, we'll keep getting better and better.

Schools must be places where important questions are asked and important answers are given: including "why are we studying this?" The people on site will be the people who struggle with those questions, and are responsible for those answers. These questions must remain the property of the community of learners - the parents, students, teachers and citizens of each school's community. In the process they will educate themselves. Over time.

They must be places where what adults learn can be put to use, where real experimental work is carried out, real evidence is considered. Kids don't have to be the equals of their faculty in such settings. In such an environment, they'll understand better that they are not lesser people, just less experienced people.

But they must be party to the work going on - allowed to listen in, privy to its secrets, taken seriously - gradually assuming more and more privileges as members-in-training of the school's "ruling class". - its faculty! Adults must represent something worthy of emulation. That means young people must be exposed to other adults as well, whose enterprises suggest a continuum between what the school represents and what other adult enterprises represent. They must see adulthood as worthy, and teachers as part of that adulthood.

In such schools hard work, hours of practice (called homework), drill and more drill, and even physical labor will seem arduous, will cause occasional rebellion, will not, in short, run smoothly - but it's got a fighting chance.

Kids will want to be well-educated when we take seriously the importance of how we define being well-educated, and thus make sure it's meaning corresponds to qualities that are esteemed in other fields of work, and when the adults in the school have an opportunity to show off such qualities in ways that create admiration, not scorn. We must make what we are trying to sell seem attractive. No, not seem, <u>be</u> attractive.

Human beings, for all of our terrible flaws, are by nature theorists, thinkers, capable of "the having of wonderful ideas", as Eleanor Duckworth says so aptly. Such capacity is connected to the fact that we are a specie that gets pleasure out of sense-making - yes, pleasure - watch a 2 year old at work. We're also capable, although this takes cultivation, of sustaining uncertainty, of postponing immediate gratification. That odd combination of hubris and humility essential to intellectual work is a tenuous, a fragile balancing act but its within the grasp of all of us. These are the hard won habits of mind, work and heart that are both natural and - in some ways - unnatural.

These traits are part of schooling and child rearing, because schooling is after all merely part of child-rearing. Not acts apart. One is a subset of the other. Child rearing and schooling are inextricably intertwined. We know this, but we pretend that we can stuff a good education into our youth against their will, regardless of their families and communities intentions, and separate from the broader task of child-rearing - the task of preparing children to be adults. Powerful schools rely on powerful relationships between people - the powerful relationship between the young and the old, as well as the young and the older, and between the adults themselves - including teachers and their community.

What will it take? In some ways we can sum up these three qualities: purpose, relationships and resources in rather mundane ways.

To start with, we could put toilet paper in bathrooms, doors on boys stalls, and mirrors above the sinks, we could put heat in their classrooms, provide safe places to store their possessions, time and space for them to talk to adults privately, (and for adults to talk to eachother too), we could be sure there are places where the young are given license to talk with their peers, and that there is safety from physical fear and from fear of ridicule: these are basics.

No canned prescribed program of self-esteem is needed when the school esteems by such ordinary practices. None is worth it. when the school does not live by such ordinary practices.

Schools must be places that every person in this room would willingly, mind you I don't even say gladly, send their own child to. If seems unthinkable to you, it should be unthinkable. All other talk is just that. These are the nearly utopian prerequisites.

When we can't meet such bottom lines, our children know something we pretend is so, aint so: that stuff about being well-educated is a ruse, an excuse by the powerful to ignore the powerless. Fancy pedagogical and curricular arguments seem just that - distractors - if the above goal is truly utopian.

There are dozens of high schools in every major city programmed to fail. Not by malicious people, but by helpless people who see no alternative! Such schools survive on a daily basis only as long as the no-shows continue not to show, and the drop outs continue to dutifully drop out. In the Bronx there is not a single high school that could open tomorrow if it performed to the standards of the average second-rate suburban school: if 90% of the students showed up and 90% stayed in school til graduation. And while there are lots of meetings in New York State to discuss new standards no one is conferring about how to add new buildings just in case such a miracle ever happened.

We can make the kids feel worse about it, but if we aren't intending to change it what are we hoping for? Do we imagine they'll finally feel so infuriated that they'll .....do their homework?

Meanwhile we can fake it by focusing on upping the ante on kids - and we'll get a modicum of statistical improvement - one can do amazing until with statistics (for example NYC has lowered its drop out rate - without increasing it graduation rare)

Or we can ask the really big questions for which there are only really big answers. And expensive ones at that. If it only were true that "once upon a time" we knew how to do it, how much easier it would be to just "do it" again. But we never did it. We just didn't pretend it was necessary. We gave drop outs, who weren't called that, honorable jobs. We took it for granted that an academic education that took kids minds seriously was not for everybody. We were snobs, but we didn't deprive the failures of all worth and, in a way, America celebrated their nonacademic panache.

We can't have it both ways. It's costing us too heavily.

But if a good education - however precisely we end up defining it - is for everybody, then everybody must be treated like a somebody. And we need to invest the resources to enable them to be somebody. That's number three.

The mantra - "all children can learn" is either an insulting truism, or an incomplete sentence. Learn what? That's the question, not the answer. If we mean that all children can learn what we once thought only a small elite could then we need to provide all kids with a fighting chance to do as well as their more prosperous white peers. But do well at what? We need to make an honest case that what we want all kids to learn is worth learning. That our standards are both universal and worthwhile. And we must provide the adults who must carry out this task sufficient authority to do the job. And the resources to carry it out.

Too many of the kids I work amongst believe they don't matter. They view their failure as the effect not the cause. We in this room know they're right, not wrong. We don't need more conferences or research reports to make a difference. While much new work needs to be done, what we know is far ahead of what we practice. We know those simple things that CPESS is based on: schools must know their pupils well, teachers must know their community well, including their colleagues and their colleagues work. Schools must have the power to make important decisions. Students must know what we value because they witness it in practice around them. We must have the resources that match the task.

These "simple things" require enormous changes in how we engage in schooling. They require changes that make our heads spin. They require "covering" far less, and learning far more. They require smaller class sizes, and insuring that nbo teacher be seriously responsible for more than 40-50 youngsters, and that they have the chance to know them and their familieswell over several years. It means teachers need time - hours and hours on a regular basis - to meet with their colleagues, to see each other teach, to teach alongside each other, to expose students to a range of adult activities and real world experiences. The arts and crafts of schooling need to be in closer alignment with the real arts and crafts of successful work and living. Students and teachers must be able to make importantdecisions collaboratively, weigh evidence and data, investigate and experiment in reality, not just out of textbooks. None of these are tasks for overnight. All require developing new language, new notions of schooling, different classrooms that may overtime barely resemble the ones of old. We need "apprentice-like" environments. We've taken a few giant steps forward at CPESS - and are today wrestling with

how to go forward lewt we otherwise slip back. It's hard work, it's going always against the grain. We've created small teams of teachers who stick with kids for several years. We've reduced the curriculum to the bone so that class sizes are small and more time can be spent on less. We've made sure the school itself is small enough so that we can meet together in one room and hear each other out. We've accepted the responsibility to set shared standards and to ask over and over - is this good enough and what next? We've decided on a first cut at what a graduate should "look like", what he or she should have to perform - in the way of a series of portfolios and a committee to whom each student must "defend" his or her work. We love you regardless, we've said - but you won't get a CPESÍ diploma until you've convinced us you've earned it.

It's coming along. We've managed to hold on to about 80% of our incoming 9th graders - less than 5% have dropped out while others have transferred or moved. And of these 80% have graduated in 4 years and 90% in five, and virtually all have gone on to college - and survived once there. But we're still far from satisfied that what they left us with is enough, and we're concerned about the 20% who don't stay with us, who include some of the "most challenging" kids - who are not likely to do better elsewhere. And we're concerned with our own tendency to backtrack, to solve problems by reverting to old norms. We'll become braver or bolder only if we are joined by others, all of whom are surrounded by a more friendly policy and regulatory system, not abandoned by impatient reformers who seek a faster route - who once again desert the necessary schoolhouse work for the top-down mandated solutions. The 8-year study called forth amazing work, and was successful - over 50 years ago. It was abandoned, not nourished by the reformers of the 1950s. We lost 3 generations in the process. Let's not repeat that.

We must have time - a generation or so before we start counting and measuring to see if these other people's children are worth what we insist on for our own kids.

In the same place in which I found Joseph Priestly's words I came up with two others:

"To make your children capable of honesty is the beginning of education," said John Ruskin and "Example is always more efficacious than precept" said Samuel Johnson.

The revolutionary changes being proposed won't matter without an alliance built upon such advice.. If we follow such sage advice, it won't be easy, but we'll have the greatest allies in the world : the kids themselves.

Such an alliance between young and dold can be built, but only on honesty and good example. It's definitely worth trying.

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